



VERMONT

Boston Globe 8-15-93

Revitalized Rutland plant challenged by neighbors

By Yvonne Daley
SPECIAL TO THE GLOBE

RUTLAND, Vt. — For a century and a half, the Howe Scale Factory, near the downtown area of Vermont's second-largest city, was the saving grace for hundreds of local men and newly arrived immigrants who found work here making industrial scales.

But for six years after the plant went out of business in 1982, this 15-acre warren of about 20 brick and wooden buildings, a foundry and railroad tracks was like a ghost town, the victim of national competition and aging facilities.

Developers from around the country looked at the site, but revitalization came locally, when Rutland contractor and realtor Joseph Giancola bought the facility in 1987 and invested \$2 million in renovations, converting it into what he calls "a village within a city."

Now named the Howe Center, the complex of 55 light industrial and commercial enterprises includes a furniture manufacturer, discount food and merchandise stores, three college annexes, a sheltered workshop for the handicapped, a recreation center, a post office and an auto body shop. In all, more than 400 are employed here.

RUTLAND, Page 38

Rutland plant faces new hurdle

■ RUTLAND

Continued from Page 37

All this may sound like a boon to Vermont's second-largest city, whose economic health has roller-coasted through some low dips in the last decade. But neighbors on the back side of the site, which borders homes, a mission for the homeless, a state fairground and several commercial properties, are sick of the constant flow of truck traffic through their narrow streets.

Led by Alderwoman Karen Moore, the neighbors asked the local environmental commission to determine if the facility needed review under Vermont's Act 250, a land-use law that has been the source of controversy.

Because the Howe Scale factory was in existence in 1970 when Act 250 was passed, it was "grandfathered."

But neighbors argue that traffic at the facility's back entrance has dramatically exceeded 1970 use, jus-

tifying Act 250 review. Former district coordinator Anthony Stout agreed, ruling that the facility needs an Act 250 permit on the traffic issue. Environmental Board attorney Aaron Adler upheld that ruling last month.

Now, Giancola says he has lost prospective tenants and cannot proceed with several planned renovations until the issue is resolved. He fears the opponents may use the process to seriously curtail his enterprise.

"I think Act 250 is critically out of control, that's what I think," said Giancola as he led a tour of the complex, through buildings once blackened by foundry smoke.

"The industries in here are all clean. That's what environmentalists want, isn't it?"

Rutland Mayor Jeffrey Wennberg is furious about the ruling and has cited it in written commentaries to state newspapers, expousing his view that environmental laws in Ver-

mont need to be streamlined and citizen input limited to more germane issues.

Alderwoman Moore and the protesting neighbors have declined to discuss the issue publicly, although Moore said she did seek help from local commissions on the issue.

The permit review will not shut down existing businesses, but could result in Giancola having to monitor traffic to the back entrance, according to Adler.

But in a state in which environmental and business interests have become increasingly polarized, the Howe Scale ruling has joined the list of what Wennberg and Giancola consider Act 250 misuses. As another example they point to the Act 250 permit recently issued to C & S Wholesale Grocers Inc. in Brattleboro. Issued to one of Vermont's largest employers, the permit contains numerous strict conditions, including limitations on traffic to the warehouse.